

Findings from a 2025 Word In Black reader survey:

Community Views on Organ Donation.

A new Word In Black survey shows strong interest in saving lives, but longstanding inequities remain a major barrier to donation.

By Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D.



Each day, roughly 13 people die in the United States waiting for an organ transplant, and a new name is added to the national transplant waitlist every eight minutes according to [Donate Life America](#). For decades, [research has shown](#) organ transplant needs exceeding available organ donations. A [2005 article in the American Journal of Transplantation](#) reported that “as a consequence of the steeply increasing demand for transplants and slowly decreasing supply of organs, the waiting list is getting longer and the waiting times for transplant candidates are getting longer.” More than 15 years later, a [2021 article](#) reported a similar trend.

But the statistics only outline the problem, not its inequities:

the burden of this crisis falls hardest on Black Americans.

Of the nearly 100,000 Americans who await a life-saving donation, [27.8%](#) are Black. [Higher rates](#) of chronic diseases – high blood pressure, diabetes, and kidney disease – disproportionately impact the Black community, leading to increased need for these life-saving organ transplants. But Black Americans remain [less likely](#) to register as organ donors at 12.6%.

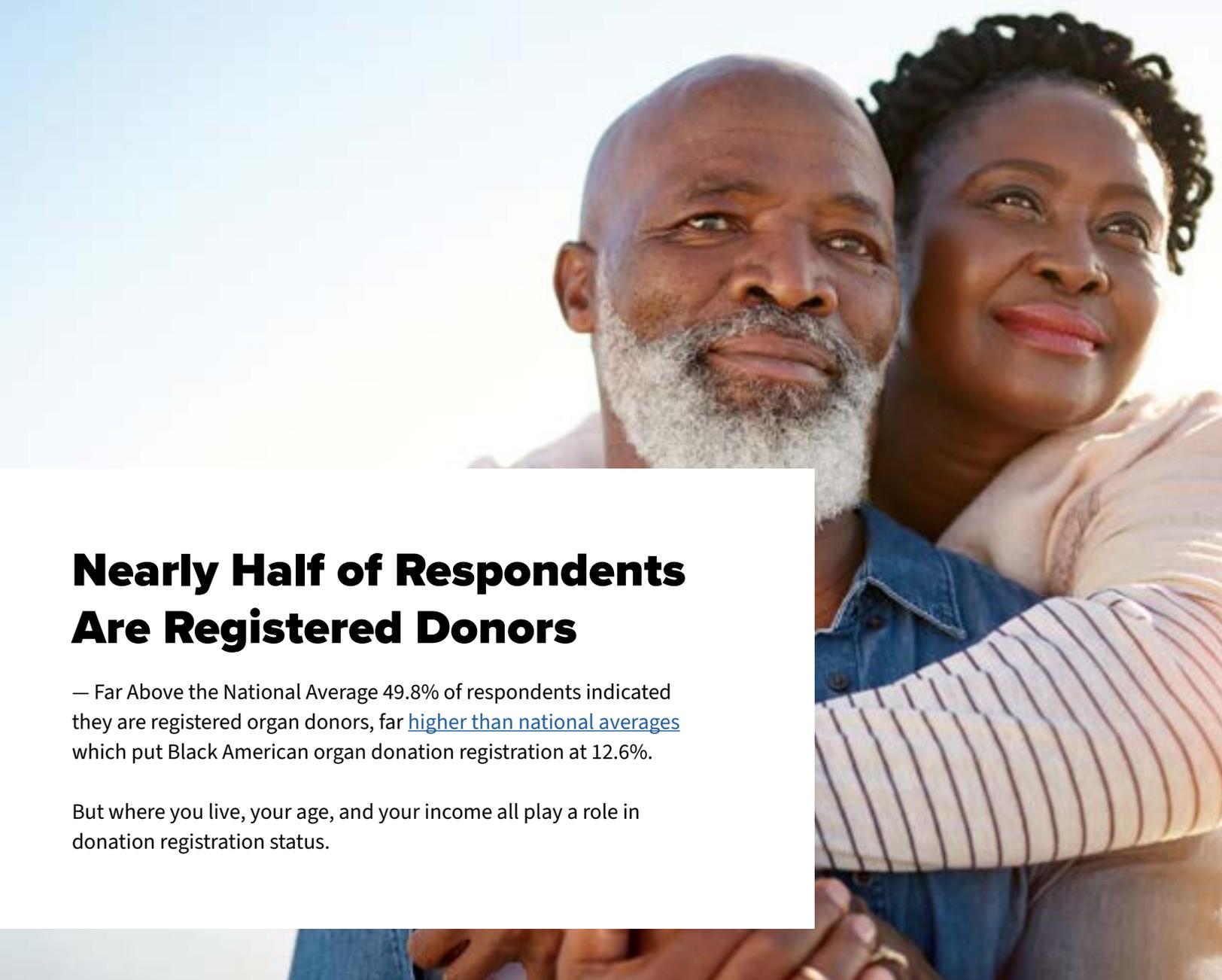
Unpacking that tension sits at the heart of Word In Black’s survey of Black adults’ views on organ donation and transplantation. Between Sept. 8 and Oct. 24, Word In Black’s Insights & Research Division conducted a survey of 1,588 Black adults about their attitudes on the issue, including perceived cultural and systemic barriers to organ donation and registration. This brief report highlights key trends in the hopes of raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and informing strategies that build trust and strengthen pathways to equitable organ donation within Black communities.

How We Did This



2025 Word In Black reader survey:

Our Findings



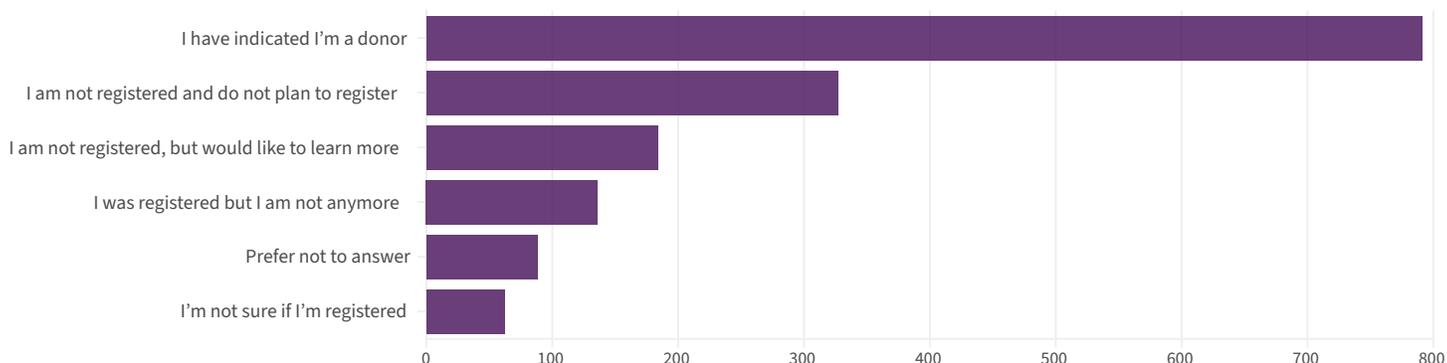
Nearly Half of Respondents Are Registered Donors

— Far Above the National Average 49.8% of respondents indicated they are registered organ donors, far [higher than national averages](#) which put Black American organ donation registration at 12.6%.

But where you live, your age, and your income all play a role in donation registration status.

The majority of respondents say they are registered organ donors

Which of the following best describes your organ donation status?



Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

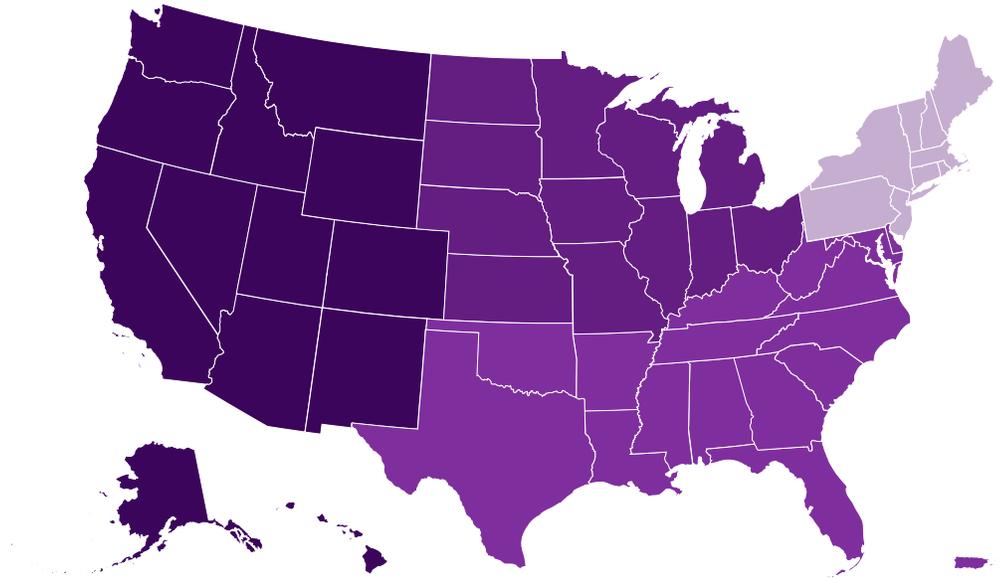


People in the West, Midwest, and South were more likely to report being registered donors (approximately 50–55%) than those in the Northeast (approximately 38%).

Donation registration by region

Lowest donation rates are in the Northeast U.S.

Donor registration % 38.3 46.6 54.9



By age group, older adults were generally more likely to report being registered donors than younger adults. While fewer than 40% of respondents aged 18-34 reported being registered donors, nearly 58% of those aged 55-64 said they were registered.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 boundaries, summitpost.org, Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

Older adults were more likely to be registered donors than young adults

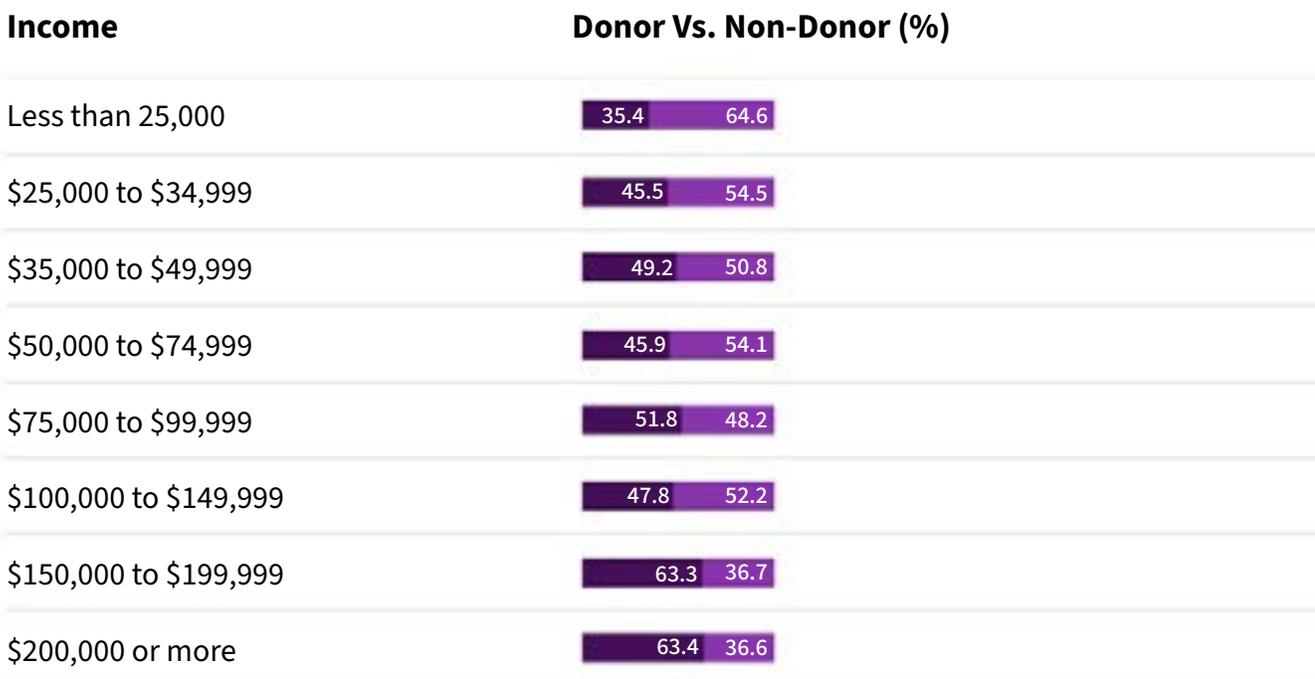


Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

Donor registration also varied significantly by income, with higher-income respondents far more likely to report being registered donors. The two highest income brackets had donor registration rates of more than 60%, compared to 35% in the lowest income bracket.

Finally, regarding gender, men and women reported similar rates of registration.

Higher-income respondents were much more likely to report being organ donors



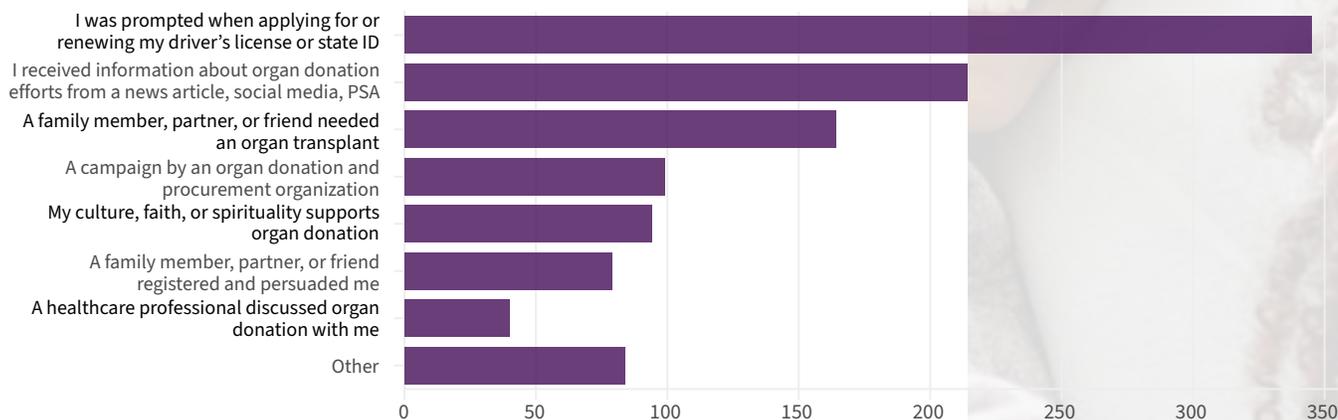
Source: Word In Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8—Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

What influences decisions to register?

Among registered organ donors, the majority said they registered because they were prompted to do so while renewing their driver's license, or after seeing a news article, social media post, public service announcement, or brochure about organ donation.

Organ donation registration influences

What influenced your decision to register as an organ donor?



Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

But among respondents who haven't registered, the strongest potential motivators weren't advertisements — they were people. Respondents said they'd be more willing to become donors if a friend or family member needed a transplant, they heard more about organ donation from other Black Americans, or if they saw more health information that features Black donors and Black families.



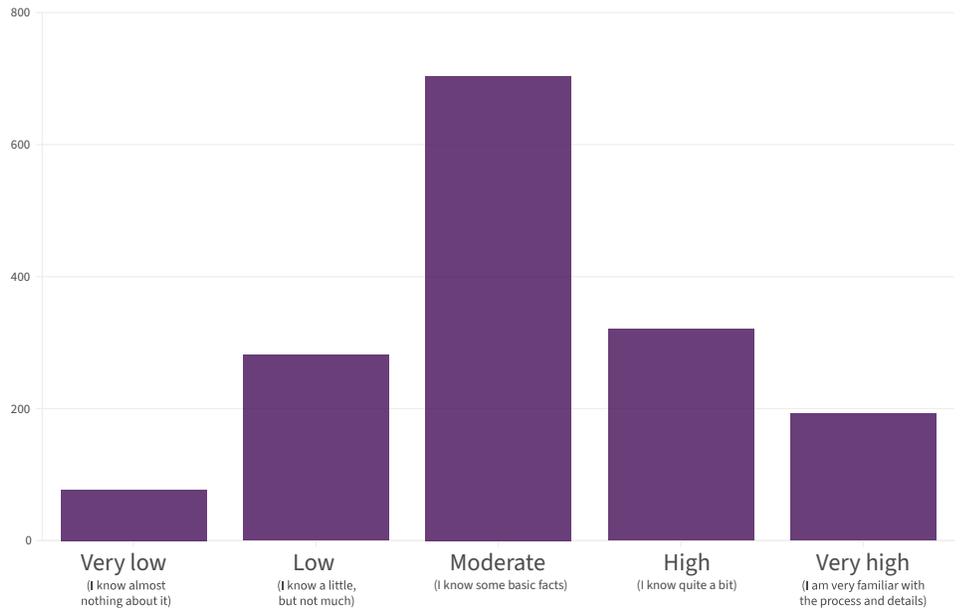
What do we know about organ donation?

Nearly 80% of respondents believe they have at least a “moderate” knowledge of organ donation — as in, ‘I know some basic facts’ — to very high — as in, ‘I am very familiar with the process and details’. A series of true/false questions were asked to put that to the test.

On many core facts about organ donation, respondents showed strong knowledge, but uncertainty in others.

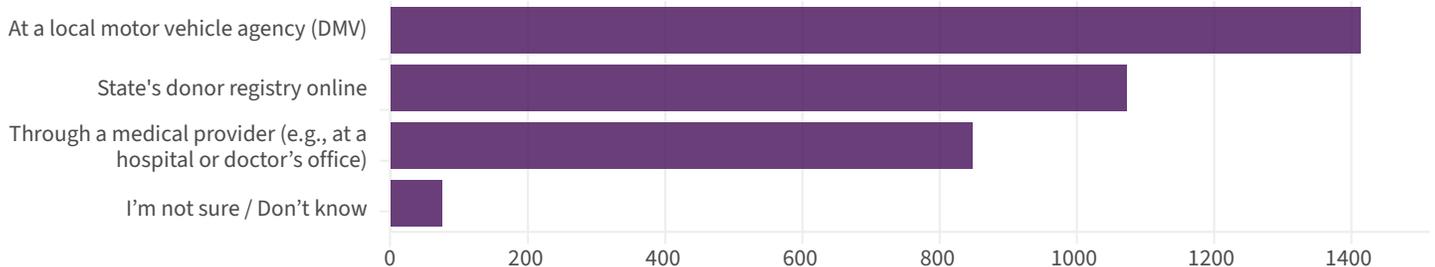
Almost 90% correctly identified the local department of motor vehicles facility as a valid place to register, and 68% knew they could register online through their state donor registry. More than half of people, however, also incorrectly indicated that you could sign up at a hospital or doctor’s office.

How would you rate your knowledge of organ donation and transplantation?



Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

Which of the following are valid ways someone can register as an organ donor?



Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
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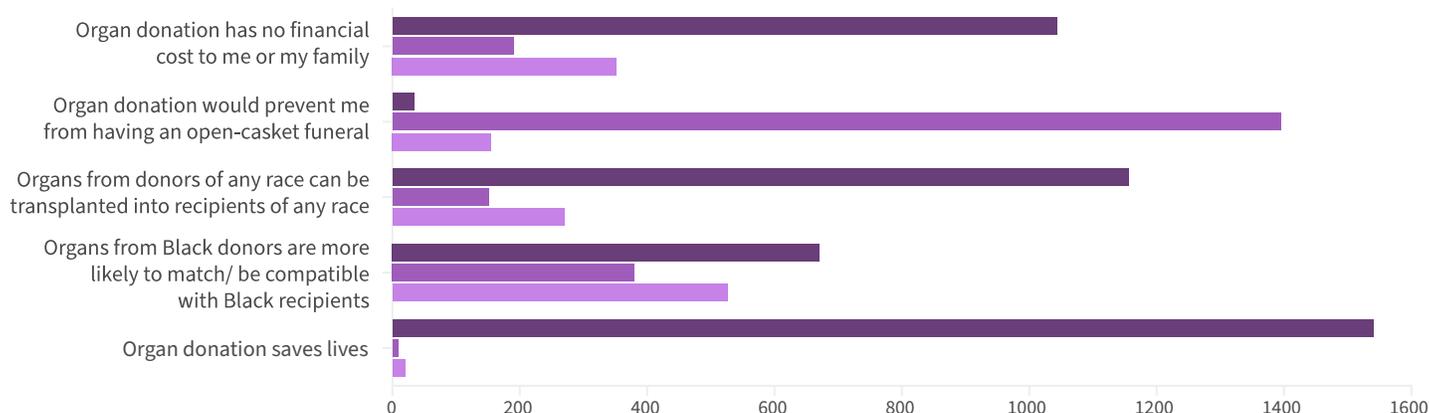
Most people correctly understood that organ donation has no cost to families, race does not limit who can receive an organ, and that organ donation saves lives – suggesting broad awareness of key truths.

Still, other misconceptions persist. Respondents were less sure about whether organs from Black donors were more likely to match/be compatible with Black recipients – but according to [LifeSource](#), an organization that assists in the organ donation process, this finding makes sense given the complexity of the science behind organ matching¹.

The majority of readers correctly identified true and false statements about organ donation

Please indicate whether you believe each of the following statements is true or false.

■ TRUE ■ FALSE ■ I'm not sure / Don't know



Source: Word in Black Community Views on Organ Donation and Transplantation Survey, conducted Sept. 8–Oct. 24, 2025
Credit: Christa Mahlobo, Ph.D. and Kyle Rickhoff

¹ While it is true that certain genetic markers are [more common within racial and ancestral groups](#) (which can increase the chance of a good match), this nuance is rarely discussed in public-facing education about donation. Most campaigns focus on the universal message that “anyone can save anyone,” which is accurate but doesn’t fully explain why increasing Black donor registration is especially important for reducing wait times among Black patients.

Beliefs and Trust

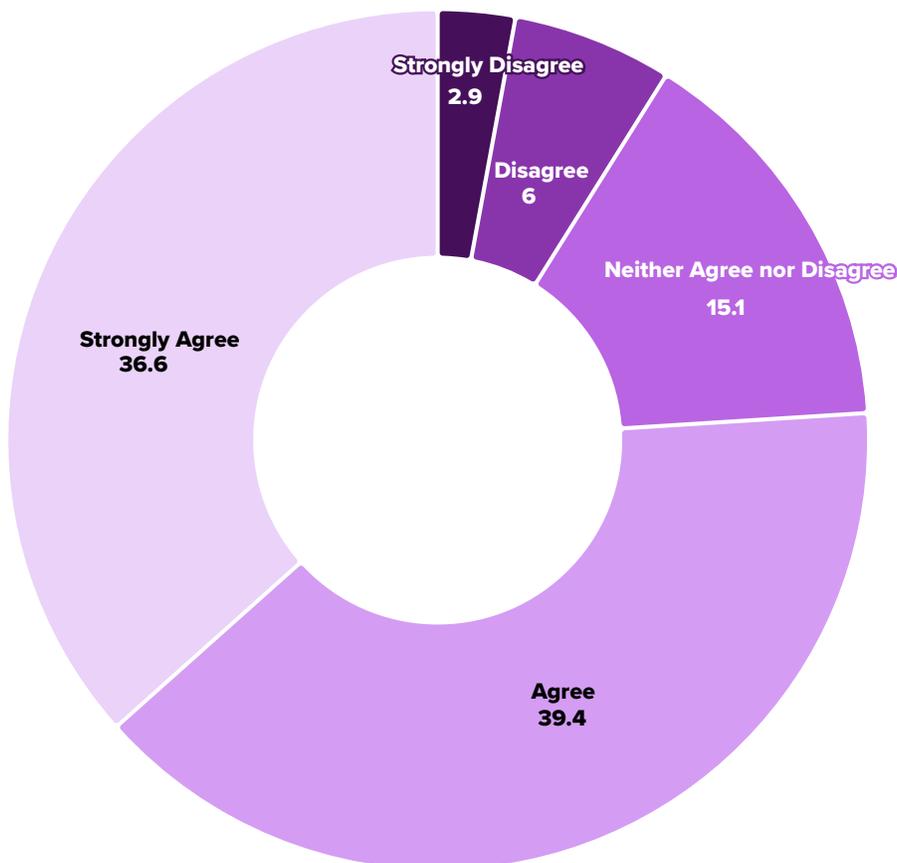


Across the survey, fairness and trust surfaced as among the strongest concerns shaping how our readers view organ donation.

For example, the belief that was most strongly endorsed was that the rich and famous received priority in the organ donation process (75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed).

75% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the rich and famous are favored in the transplant process

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on organ donation and transplantation: The rich or famous are more likely to get a transplant



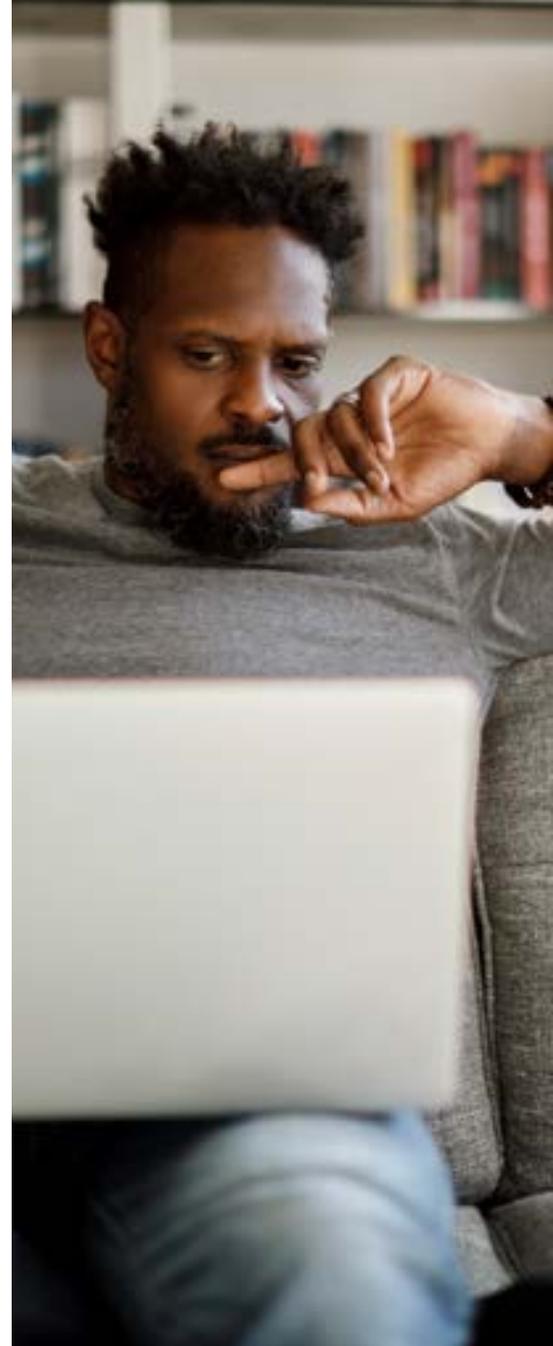
Also, while a majority rejected the idea that donation conflicts with their cultural or spiritual beliefs, far fewer expressed confidence in the systems responsible for organ procurement and transplantation. Among our respondents, we found that:

More than **50%** agree or strongly agree that an organ “black market” exists and only 8% strongly disagree with the idea that a black market exists.

57% believe Black patients aren’t treated with the same dignity as others during the transplant process.

And nearly **1 in 4 worry** doctors might not try as hard to save their life if they’re listed as an organ donor.

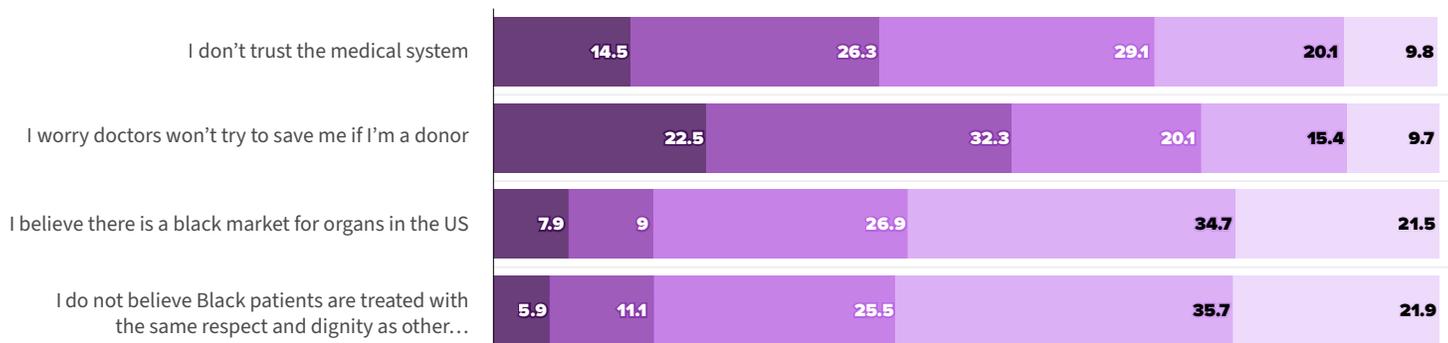
These beliefs mirror the deep, longstanding concerns about inequity and mistreatment in medical care in the Black community found in a recent [Pew Research Study](#). Historic race-based medical malpractice incidents – from the infamous [Untreated Tuskegee Syphilis Study](#) to the experiments the “father of modern gynecology” [conducted without anesthesia on enslaved Black women](#) – contribute to present-day concerns that shape community sentiment about donation. Understanding these perceptions is an essential first step toward building trust and improving donor registration in Black communities.



Trust and beliefs in organ donation

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on organ donation and transplantation

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



What Our Readers Want To Ask About Organ Donation

Finally, we asked our readers an open-ended question:

If you could ask a health care provider or someone who has received an organ transplant one question about organ donation, what would you ask?

A number of themes emerged throughout these responses, revealing both a desire to contribute and a need for honesty, clarity, and care.

On a global level, respondents voiced concerns around trust in the health care system, more transparency in the organ donation process, and fairness in how transplant recipients are chosen — specifically citing fears about barriers Black patients face.

On a more personal level, respondents worried about their safety and well-being after donating or receiving a donation, asking questions like, *“Is the process safe?”*, *“What kind of care and support do donors receive after they donate?”* and *“How has your life changed since the transplant, both physically and emotionally?”*





The Most Common Themes

Trust and Equity in the Health care System

Concerns about racial disparities, fairness, and systemic bias in organ allocation and treatment.

“Why is there such a disproportionate mistreatment of BIPOC when it comes to pain management and organ care?”

Access and Prioritization

Questions about how transplant recipients are chosen and whether Black patients face barriers.

“Do Black Americans face more challenges getting on transplant lists or being approved for organs?”

Transparency of the Process

Curiosity about how organs are retrieved, matched, and handled post-donation.

“When and how are donated organs retrieved after the donor passes away?”

Safety and Ethics

Concerns about the safety, ethics, or fairness of the organ donation process.

“Is the process safe? How do I know my organs won't be used unethically?”

Personal Experience and Emotional Impact

Interest in hearing firsthand from recipients or donors about their feelings and recovery.

“How do you feel after receiving a transplant?”

Post-Donation Support

Questions about what happens to donors and their families after donation.

“What kind of care and support do organ donors receive after they donate?”

Systemic Distrust and Historical Injustice

Skepticism rooted in historical and ongoing inequities in the medical treatment of Black Americans.

“Why have you all tolerated such a corrupt and discriminatory system of prioritizing who gets organ transplants historically?”



A Snapshot of Black America's Views on Organ Donation

The findings from this survey and report offer a snapshot of how a segment of Black adults think and feel about organ donation – from their knowledge and motives to concerns rooted in inequity and the deep, traumatic history of medical mistrust in the Black community. It shows a community willing to help others in need, but that has fundamental questions about organ donation that need more transparent answers.

If you'd like to sign up to become an organ donor, register through your state's department of motor vehicles or at registerme.org.

To find out more: View the [methodology](#) and [survey questions](#) used for this report, as well as stories from our news series on organ donation, [On Borrowed Time](#).